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EMBARGOED UNTIL 9:30 A.M. CST AUGUST 29, 2006

IOWA STUDENTS EXCEL AT COLLEGE PREP

(DES MOINES, IOWA) – AUGUST 28, 2006 – Iowa's class of 2006 high school graduates continued their trend of outstanding scores on the college prep SAT exam, and more students are participating in and excelling at college-level coursework, according to data from the 2006 summary report from College Board, which administers both the Advanced Placement (AP) and SAT programs, and the Iowa Department of Education.

On the SAT exam, Iowa student Critical Reading (previously termed "verbal") scores improved to 602 from 596 last year, and Math scores improved to 613 from 608. In addition, the average Iowa score was 591 on the Writing section, which was recently added to the test. The 2006 national mean Critical Reading score was 503 (a decline of 5 points from last year), the mean Math score was 518 (a decline of two points), and the Writing mean was 497. The highest possible score is 800 in each category.

State SAT participation remained low at about 1,477 students (about 4 percent of graduates) compared to the 65 percent of Iowa graduates who take the ACT college prep exam. The low SAT participation means the SAT results should not be used as an indicator of overall system performance or student achievement when compared to other indicators or college-prep exams such as the ACT, said Judy Jeffrey, director of the Iowa Department of Education.

"We are pleased that a high percentage of students take at least one of the college entrance exams, because it means a large number are planning to continue their education," said Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack. "To compete in the global economy of the 21st century additional education or training beyond high school is essential. The progress we are making across the board in post secondary preparation will ensure the youth of today will be ready to meet the challenges of tomorrow."

Additional data from College Board and the Department of Education shows more students are taking the advanced courses they need to be prepared for college, based on the numbers enrolled in AP courses, dual credit courses, and Post Secondary Enrollment Option courses.

"We have emphasized over the past several years that high schools must provide a wide range of student opportunities," Jeffrey said. "We understand that may be more challenging for schools with limited budgets or limited enrollment. They often have to be more creative with their solutions when they decide how to provide the options that students need."

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During the 2005-06 school year, 195 of Iowa's 365 districts offered at least one AP course. About 15,000 students were enrolled in at least one course, and 6,607 of them took at least one of the optional final exams, a 9.3 percent increase over 6,047 test-takers last year.

AP courses are college-level studies available to high school students, most often in their junior or senior years. Students choose among 34 classes in 19 subject areas, with an optional final exam at the completion of the course. Iowa students took a total of 9,833 final exams, compared to 8,986 the prior year, and 69.8 percent of them scored 3 or higher; 5 is the highest possible score. Nationally, 59.6 percent of students scored 3 or higher. Many colleges grant credit or advanced placement to students with high AP exam scores.

The Iowa Online AP Academy at the Belin-Blank International Center for Gifted Education at the University of Iowa, now in its sixth year, is credited with providing more students with access to AP courses via the Internet. Through May 2006, 325 accredited Iowa high schools registered with the [Iowa Online AP Academy](#), representing all 12 Area Education Agencies and 96 counties. About 95 percent are rural or small schools, according to IOAPA. During the 2005-06 school year, about 1,500 accredited public and private school students took one of the 13 online courses, and more than 2,000 have used other AP materials and processes provided by the academy.

The Iowa Online AP Academy also offers tuition grants to teachers who attend the Advanced Placement Teacher Training Institute conducted at the University of Iowa. The grants have supported nearly 500 Iowa teachers over the past five years.

Another popular option for college-level coursework among Iowa high schoolers is dual credit – the opportunity to take a course either at a high school or college that qualifies for both high school and college credit. Preliminary data from the Iowa Department of Education shows 23,000 students from 279 districts took 163,000 hours of dual credit at a community college during the 2005-06 school year. Similar to dual credit is the Post Secondary Enrollment Option, which allows an eligible high school student to enroll in and attend a college class at the college. During the 2005-06 school year, about 5,400 students from more than 290 districts took nearly 8,890 PSEO courses.

“High schools absolutely must provide these advanced course options for their students,” Vilsack said, “and they must go a step further to motivate and in some cases require their students to take those courses. As adults, we must help guide their paths so more students reach their full potential.”

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